

September 23, 2014

Dear Legislators,

We are writing this letter to ask for your assistance in helping our daughter, Michaela, obtain the transition services that she needs to live a rewarding life as a independent adult. Our daughter has Aspergers and has faced many challenges over the past several years. Michaela is an intelligent, seemingly typical, eighteen-year old girl who has the goal to attend college like many of her peers. She is capable of college-level work academically but is unable to attend due to her inability to understand non-literal language or most social cues. This has resulted in her having extreme difficulty in school, especially middle school and high school.

Michaela has been in many different school settings both private and public in the attempt to try to find an environment where she could feel comfortable, fit in, and be able to learn the skills necessary to prepare her for college, work, and adulthood. Like many children on the spectrum, Michaela has other co-morbid conditions that make it difficult for her to achieve her goals. It took several years of meetings and requests for testing before our daughter was able to be tested, diagnosed, and identified so that she could receive the services she badly needed. During her junior year of high school she was placed in four different school settings in the attempt to find an appropriate program that could meet her needs. The stress and anxiety of all these changes, along with her Aspergers and other conditions, resulted in her being hospitalized three different times within eight months before being placed in the residential school program she is currently attending. Although this program has been a very difficult adjustment for Michaela, she has been working hard to learn the social and life skills necessary for her to realize her goals. However, despite the current supports she is receiving, she still has a long way to go before ever being able to attend college, work a job, or live independently.

A good transition program which includes job training and coaching is essential to children like our daughter. Despite requesting job exposure and coaching in her annual transition plan since she was fifteen, Michaela has not had any job exposure. It is our understanding that this is primarily due to a lack of available programs between employers and the schools. Michaela would be unable to hold a job without training and a coach to help her understand the social requirements as well as job and employer expectations. As our daughter gets older she realizes that the statistics for adults on the spectrum are not good and that without supports she will most likely not be able to accomplish her goals of going to college, obtaining a job, and being an independent adult. This realization has resulted in her suffering much anxiety and depression. She keeps asking us for reassurance that someday she will be able to live a life and enjoy the experiences that other kids her age are already working toward.

Young adults like our daughter, Michaela, need transition services to become productive, happy, and independent members of society. As much as we try as parents, we cannot provide all that is needed for our children. Please make it a priority to expand the transition services including training, coaching, housing, and other supports necessary for children like ours to reach their potential and be successful in life.

Sincerely,

Robert and Barbara Merrick